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PARTING ADVICE.

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A

**FAREWELL SERMON,**

PREACHED TO THE

**PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CONGREGATION  
OF ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, CARLISLE:**

*by*  
*Joseph Spencer*

ON SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 1830.



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TO  
**THE MEMBERS**  
OF THE  
*Protestant Episcopal Congregation*  
OF  
**ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, CARLISLE.**

My dear brethren:

Although the pastoral tie which formerly united us, was some time since severed, and the superintendence of your spiritual concerns has been committed to a brother in the ministry, who, I trust, will be able more effectually to promote the interests of religion among you, yet I am still desirous of serving you as far as my present situation and duties will permit. The following discourse, therefore, which you will remember was preached on my taking leave of you as your minister, is offered to your acceptance with that view, and as a trifling mark of the love I bear you, and of my solicitude for your welfare. It contains advice which, I think, is worthy of being borne in mind, and which, if attended to, will not fail, in your peculiar circumstances, to prove essentially useful. May God grant his blessing upon this, as well as upon all other attempts to contribute to your prosperity and happiness.

I am, my dear brethren,  
very respectfully and affectionately,  
your friend and fellow servant in the gospel,  
J. SPENCER.



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II COR. XIII.

**FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL.**

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As my pastoral connection with you is this afternoon to be dissolved, and as I have, for that reason, several things to say to you which could not be brought together under an ordinary text, I have chosen the passage of scripture just repeated, in order to allow myself sufficient latitude for any remarks that may, to my own mind, seem most proper. I confess I have looked forward to this day with feelings which I cannot well describe; and the duty which I am now called upon to perform is undertaken with no little reluctance: yet it must be performed, and I must leave you. I trust, therefore, that God will enable us to improve the occasion to the greatest advantage, and that it may be the means of uniting us more closely to himself, and of strengthening us in every good and virtuous feeling.

Our text, it has been said, is of a very general nature, and will allow me to indulge in such remarks as I shall have reason to think most suitable to the occasion; I shall, there-

fore, proceed to submit those remarks to your consideration, according as their own importance, or the bearing which they have upon your welfare, may suggest them.

I. The present occasion requires then that I should remind you once more—I say once more, because the same point was presented to you on Sunday last, yet not so fully perhaps, as was desirable—of the nature of that kind of instruction which you have received from me since I have been among you. I have not scrupled to declare to you what I conceived to be the whole counsel of God. The goodness, the mercy, the love, the power, the justice of God, have often been exhibited before you, especially as those attributes have been displayed in the scheme of redemption which he has devised for the salvation of mankind. How frequently, and how earnestly I have dwelt upon the merits of the Saviour, you cannot but well remember. His birth, his life, his sufferings and death, and the prophecies which foretold his coming into the world, have all been repeatedly the subjects of my addresses to you. The Blessed Spirit also has been proclaimed to you as your sanctifier—as the cause of every thing good, both in the heart, and in the life of the

Christian. The deep, the entire corruption of human nature has no less frequently been urged upon your notice; and that without a change of heart, and renewal in the image of Christ, you cannot be his disciples, you can have no valid hope of the blessings of religion in a future state. What, therefore, I have now, when I am about to bid you adieu, to say with regard to these points, and all others that have been the subjects of my discourses to you, is this: If what I have preached to you has met your approbation, as being in accordance with the principles of your church, and with scripture, "Hold fast the form of sound words which you have received;" be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." Trouble not yourselves with those knotty points in theology, which do not minister to edification, ~~which~~ serve rather to worry and perplex the mind, and to throw around religion an air of gloom and mystic absurdity, than to adorn her with the beauty and loveliness of the gospel. But such truths as are necessary to your spiritual life, never relinquish on any consideration whatever. The moment you do, your

religion will begin to decline, and spiritual death will probably be the consequence.

I wish to be understood, however, when I speak of knotty points in theology, to refer to doctrines, not to precepts—not to the rules of morality, nor even to matters of discipline, and church government. None of these things can be considered knotty. Every one can understand them as far as is necessary to his being a true, and consistent, and steady member of the church of Christ, and of course, as fully as is requisite to his own happiness.

Endeavour then to call to mind what has been so repeatedly enforced in your presence on these important topics. With regard to that kind of morality which should characterize the Christian, remember that it has never been described as so loose and unrestrained in its nature, that it will allow you to live as you please, and yet entertain hopes of heaven. I have never encouraged you to expect happiness in another world, without practical holiness in this. Self denial with regard to yourselves, charity and peacefulness with regard to others, and love and zeal towards God, are the great features of the morality which I have constantly preached to



you. Consider how often the world and its follies have been spoken against, what a dangerous enemy to the Christian it has uniformly been represented to be: consider, further, how often the example of Christ has been held up to you for your imitation, and how urgently you have been exhorted to copy it on all occasions, and in all circumstances in which you could do so. I again say, my dear brethren, and I say it with an earnest desire that my words may never be erased from your memory, that you must avoid the world—I mean its spirit and its corrupt practices—if you wish to please God, and to save your souls; you must endeavour to imitate the example of Christ, if you wish to be with him when you die. This is a truth of the utmost concern to you, and should influence you at all times: it will be more likely than any thing else to make you steady and persevering in your Christian walk and conversation, and anxious so to “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father, who is in heaven.”

As it respects church discipline, and church government, which I have also said are not among the knotty points in theology, I feel it

an especial and indispensable duty at this time, to exhort you to remember what you have heard, and to cleave to the principles which have been advocated before you. The principles which I have advocated on these points, are those of your own church, they are those of the church of God in all ages, they are those of the holy scriptures. Who, therefore, could think of deserting them? Who, for a moment, could entertain the idea of giving up, in any degree, that primitive mode of worship, those admirable forms of service, which do so much honour to the Episcopal church, and which are no less necessary for the improvement of her members in holy feelings, and in purity of life, than they are for the preservation of decency and order in the house of God? Who could think of relinquishing a form of the ministry, and an order of church government, so manifestly of apostolic origin? Hold fast, my brethren, the profession of your faith without wavering. Let no man deceive you with vain words. The truth should be your supreme delight and ardent desire; and he that allows himself to be drawn off from the truth, and the true path of religious duty, even if it be but for a moment, is in danger of an irreparable

loss, the loss of his soul. God grant that none of my hearers may ever be so unfortunate!

II. I have a few words to say to you on the subject of that connection which subsists between a clergyman and the people of his charge, a subject which I have hitherto only hinted at, from the idea that the relation which I bore to you would have rendered it somewhat indelicate. Now, however, when that relation is about to be no more, I feel myself at liberty to throw off my reserve, and to speak without disguise, or hesitation; and as I do it entirely with a view to your own benefit, and that of your future pastor, I hope and believe my remarks will be received in that kindly spirit in which they are undoubtedly offered.

I may be permitted then to observe, that some of this congregation do not appear to me to have correct notions of the relation which they bear to the minister who is placed over them. This has been my opinion ever since I have resided in this place, and it has often been a matter of no little regret to me. The connection of a minister with the people of his charge is not that of mere acquaintance: Nor is it the tie of social life, even in the

greatest degree of intimacy and friendship of which it is capable: it is, indeed, much more, both more important, and more sacred. It has to do with concerns of infinite importance, and therefore it bears upon, and brings into action, not simply one, but all the better feelings of our nature. The peculiar character of this connection, however, will be best seen by considering, first, what attentions the members of a congregation have a right to expect from their minister; and next, what return they are bound to make for those attentions.

The primary idea which enters into the scriptural notion of a minister of the gospel is, undoubtedly, that of a spiritual guide. A minister has, under God, the direction of the spiritual concerns of those over whom he may be placed. Not that they are either to follow his advice, or imitate his example, blindly, and without reflection, and with an absurd, and it may be, fatal devotion to his person. Ministers may, and often do fall into error, as well as others, and therefore there is need of reflection and care on the part of those, of whose spiritual concerns they may have the charge. When I say that a minister is the spiritual guide of his congregation,

I mean only this; that he is to explain to them the doctrines of religion, and to do it diligently, and to the best of his ability; that he is to enforce the duties of religion, and to do it earnestly and zealously; that he is, by his life and conduct, to endeavour to exemplify the principles which he inculcates; that he is, in their sickness, and in all their afflictions, to be their comforter, and to show, as correctly as may be, in what manner such visitations are best improved. He is to be their adviser in all matters that pertain to religion, to promote a spirit of peace, of love, and of harmony among them; and to discourage by all the influence and energy which he possesses, a spirit of discord and disunion. And moreover, he is to pray for them, to watch over them, to mark their deviations from the path of duty, and to exert himself to bring them back by all the means in his power. In fine, to use the language of an apostle, he is to watch for their souls, as one who must give an account of his conduct to God.

Viewing the duties of a minister in this light, do they not appear to be most interesting and most important—interesting and important, I mean, as it respects both himself



and the people of his charge? Surely to himself the idea that he is the herald of peace and salvation to his fellow candidates for eternity, that he is to them, in their many cares and sorrows, as it were, an angel of light and consolation, must be most cheering and delightful. It must completely smooth down all the roughness of duty, and inspire him with the most ardent affection for them, and zeal in endeavouring to train them for heaven. And to the people of his charge, what could be more pleasant, if they are duly sensible of the value of religion to their happiness, than to have a person on whose judgment, and religious feeling, they could rely in matters so essential to their welfare; who having well formed, and deeply rooted religious opinions of his own, could check the growth of erroneous ones in others; who could render the path of duty, though narrow, yet so straight and luminous, that it could not be mistaken unless by design; who, when sorrow might assail them, or death approach, would always be ready to administer consolation; and a kind of consolation too most suitable to their circumstances; which, in fact, disarms sickness of its pains, and death of its terrors, Certainly there can be

no one who would not delight to have a friend, that could render him services so essential to his comfort and happiness both in time, and in eternity. Nothing assuredly could be more necessary to such weak, and erring creatures, as the best of Christians are.

On the other hand, if the duties of a minister are faithfully performed, if the attentions due to his flock are properly bestowed, there is a return which he has a right to expect from them, and which they are bound, in gratitude, and by their relation to him, to make. If they do not make it, they not only stand in the way of their own interest, but unquestionably violate the most obvious dictates of duty. What this return is let us now consider.

1. The first thing to be noticed in it is obedience. This is expressly enjoined by the scriptures: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." The nature of the obedience due from a congregation to their clergyman, no one can have any difficulty in understanding, who will consult the word of God on the subject. I have already said that it is not a blind submission to his will in all things, nor an absurd devotion

to his person. That would be to render themselves his vassals, and not, as the apostle says, to become his joy and crown of rejoicing. The obedience to which I refer, consists mainly in receiving cheerfully his admonitions and instructions, and in yielding becoming deference to his opinion in all matters which concern his profession. A minister is presumed to know more of religion than his flock, because religion is his peculiar study. It is the business of his life to make himself acquainted with its truths; hence he cannot but understand them better, provided he has the true spirit of his profession, than those whose time and thoughts are occupied with the pursuits and concerns of the world. He has more time also, and better opportunities for retirement and prayer, than they. Therefore, he should be more frequent and more earnest in the performance of that duty, and may consequently be supposed to possess more of the light and influence of the Holy Spirit. For these reasons, to treat his opinion, whether it relate to a matter of doctrine or practice, with contempt, or even lightly, is plainly a violation of duty on the part of his charge, and must undoubtedly be displeasing to him un-



der whose authority he acts. This, however, is not unfrequently done. There is a pride of opinion with some people, which makes them obstinate even on subjects about which they cannot be supposed to know much, if any thing at all. However hastily their notions may have been formed and adopted, however slight the grounds on which they rest, yet they must be right and all others wrong. Such persons cannot endure the idea of appearing to be led by others in the opinions which they form on any subject whatever. It would be an insult, they think, to their understandings. Others again delight in opposition merely for opposition's sake. They find fault with, and condemn the sentiments of their neighbours, not from a conviction that they are right, but from a desire to make their neighbours appear to be wrong. But the most numerous class of those persons who array themselves in opposition to ministers of the gospel, and who contrive most effectually to lessen their influence, are such as pretend to trace their opinions and their conduct to selfishness and a love of power. Priestcraft seems to be the great bugbear of the present age. The world is almost run mad from the fear of it. In all the

movements, and even in the very looks of clergymen, mankind think they discover it lurking, and giving a tone to all their thoughts, and entering into all their designs. Thus their admonitions and exhortations, however ardent and sincere, are frequently deprived of their force, and fall, without effect and without profit, upon the ear of their audience. My brethren, I cannot help earnestly entreating you to be on your guard against an error of so dangerous a tendency. It would be better for you to have no minister at all, than to allow unjust and injurious suspicions of his sincerity and disinterestedness to stand in the way of his usefulness among you. I do not pretend to say that any of you have ever fallen into such an error, but still the caution can do you no harm. May God give you grace always to be meek and modest in your religious profession, and to receive, with a teachable temper, the instructions of your pastor.

2. In the next place, a minister has a right to expect from his congregation in return for the duties which he performs for them, to be treated with all the confidence and affection of the most intimate friendship. To every member of his charge he will assuredly be a

friend, if he has the proper feelings of his station: why then should he not be treated with the same kindness and attention, which he feels himself bound to bestow? Distance and reserve, and backwardness, are entirely out of place with regard to him. With formality and ceremony he ought to have nothing to do. However proper they may be with respect to others, with respect to him they should be laid aside. Whenever they are practised, they will unavoidably cramp and impede his intercourse with his flock, and not unfrequently cause him to feel a reluctance in the discharge of his private duties among them, which nothing but a deep sense of the responsibility of his station will enable him to overcome. Therefore a congregation, I mean every member of it according to his circumstances, ought, if for no other reason, at least for their own good, to show their minister not merely common politeness, but such attentions as will prove to his mind that they have a proper sense of the value of his services, and desire to be on terms of the most friendly intercourse with him. His visits among them then will be free, social, and unembarrassed, and he will perform his du-

ties with cheerfulness and comfort to himself, and with advantage to all concerned.

While I am on this point, it is proper to mention that there are two ways in which a want of confidence in a minister may display itself, that are especially to be guarded against. One of these ways is, suspecting him of particular partialities and preferences, and cherishing a feeling of jealousy on the ground of such suspicion; and the other, taking offence at apparent, or supposed neglect. These things ought never to take place in any congregation of Christian worshippers. They are the most deadly poison to religion. They destroy peace, they load the mind with evil thoughts, and are apt to give rise to much improper, censorious conversation, and sometimes to conduct unworthy of the Christian name and character. I have already said that the relation in which a minister stands to the people of his charge, makes him the friend of them all, their guide, their brother, their spiritual father: therefore he loves all, and wishes to do good to all. He will not make himself a party in any disputes, but endeavour to quell them by all the influence which he possesses. A charitable construction also should be put upon all he does; and

those who are so intimately connected with him as the persons to whom he is continually distributing the bread of eternal life, should be very slow indeed to allow any idea that would in the least mar their respect and attachment for him, to arise in their minds. Nothing but the most obvious and often repeated proofs of design on his part to do wrong, could at all justify them in doing so.

3. Lastly, a congregation ought cheerfully and cordially to co-operate with their minister in his endeavours to be useful. It is not enough that they should not oppose him, or use means to lessen his influence, and to prevent the success of his plans for doing good: they must do more; they must assist him: they must rally round him, and be ready to aid him, not only with their prayers but with their time, with their money, and with their counsel. Clergymen can do little good by their own individual efforts; and if they are deprived of the encouragement and support of their hearers, their zeal will be apt very quickly to cool, and their attempts at improvement will be few and feeble, and ineffectual. The condition of that congregation in which the minister is compelled to act alone in promoting the interests of religion, is pitiable in-



deed: it is exactly in that state of lukewarmness, which is so pointedly condemned in scripture, and which never fails, without repentance, and humiliation, and a change of conduct on the part of the persons concerned, to terminate in total dissolution and ruin. Co-operate, therefore, my brethren, zealously and actively with your clergyman, and the blessing of God will doubtless be with you and prosper you. He will make you burning and shining lights in the world, and an honour to the church to which you belong.

Although I might enlarge to almost any extent on the relation of a clergyman to the people of his charge, yet as there is another point of some importance on which I am desirous of offering you a few thoughts, and as I do not wish to be tedious, I will be contented with simply one remark in addition to what has been said respecting it. The remark which I have to make relates particularly to yourselves. Your error, if you have erred at all in this matter, consists in not manifesting,—I will not say in not placing, for of that I am by no means certain,—that degree of confidence in your minister which his connection with you, and his usefulness among you, seem to require. Some of my audience,

I do not intend the remark to apply to all, are too backward, and do not lay themselves open to that freedom of intercourse which is agreeable. I mention this not in the way of blame: I only suggest it as an error which may be easily corrected. Possibly too, I may be mistaken: yet such an impression has been made upon my own mind, and if I should be in an error, I have no doubt the good feeling of my hearers will readily excuse me.

III. The third and last thing to which I propose calling your attention at this time is the kind of conduct which Christians should observe towards each other. To Christians of other denominations you of course, stand in a relation somewhat different from that which you bear to the members of your own Church; hence, your treatment of them will, in some respects, be different, although still such as to prove that you view them as fellow-labourers in the same great cause with yourselves, and as heirs of the same cheering hopes and promises. Let us consider what your conduct ought to be in each case, so as not to be unworthy of your Christian profession.

With Christians of other denominations then you should endeavour to be at peace. Remember the apostolic precept: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, be at peace

with all men." They, therefore, that do not cultivate the virtue of peacefulness, but are fond of contention and strife, violate a divine command, and most assuredly incur guilt and condemnation. The manner in which peace is to be maintained is obvious. It is by no sacrifice of principle, by no compromise of your religion. That would be to obtain it at a dear rate indeed, great a blessing as it is. It is by acting towards your Christian brethren of other denominations justly and honourably in all your dealings with them, by treating them with friendship and kindness in all your social intercourse with them, and especially by not intermeddling in their religious concerns. Union, in religious exercises between persons of different religious persuasions, it is supposed by some, tends to the advancement of piety, because, they think, it promotes among them a spirit of fellow-feeling and benevolence. But experience proves otherwise. Connections of that nature seldom fail, and for very plain reasons, to produce greater estrangement and hostility between the parties concerned. They never can take place without yielding on the part of some, and advantage gained on the part of others. And yielding, it is well



known, creates suspicion and jealousy, and advantage gained is followed by domineering and arrogance. This is human nature. Such always have been, and such always will be, to some extent, the results of those ill-judged, heterogeneous associations against which I am warning you. Why then should you expose yourselves to dangers which have proved hurtful to so many of your fellow-Christians? Why throw yourselves in the way of temptation, and destroy your own peace, and the peace of those around you, when you might so easily avoid it? The good sense, and Christian discretion of my hearers will, I trust, always protect them against an error fraught with such pernicious consequences.

Let me not, however, be understood to object to your being present at the public religious exercises of persons who differ from you in their manner of worship. You may, indeed, sometimes attend their preaching with benefit. It is, however, to be regretted that it too frequently consists of declamation against your own church, and when that is the case, when any individual has signalized himself in that way, it is not only advisable, but your duty to absent yourselves from his preaching. They that countenance and en-

courage any one, who opposes and endeavours to bring into discredit what they believe to be the truth, doubtless act inconsistently with a sincere and simple profession of their faith. They are indirectly arrayed against their own principles; they discourage, by their example, what they profess to consider real scriptural religion; and therefore they lay themselves liable to merited censure in the sight both of God and man. Still, however, you should not be bitter and fierce in revenging such insults, but peaceable, and quiet, and mild, and always ready to profit by what you may hear and see good in others.

With one another you should not merely be at peace; you should be much more; you should be of one heart, and one soul. Forbearance, and a love of harmony, and good feeling should characterize all your intercourse with each other. There is nothing more disagreeable, there is nothing more disgusting, than to see members of the same congregation displeased, and quarreling with each other: nor, on the contrary, is there any thing more pleasant, than to see them displaying mutual friendship and love, anxiously striving to avoid every thing that would be likely to excite painful feelings in the breast

of any one, and eager to promote each other's happiness. The religion which you profess is peculiarly and emphatically a religion of love and harmony; and there is no surer evidence that a person does not enjoy it in the degree that is necessary to save him, than his possessing an unamiable, turbulent temper, always ready to take offence, and hard to be reconciled to those with whom he has become offended.

I may be permitted here, my brethren, to caution you also against indulging in censures of the religion of others. This caution I give as well with reference to persons of other denominations, as to members of your own communion. The scriptures say of every follower of Christ, that to his own master he standeth or falleth. We are not to decide upon the exercises of his mind, nor the state of his heart, however widely he may differ from us in his views of religion. It is usurping the prerogative of Christ to do so. People who are ardent in their temperament are peculiarly liable to this fault. They are apt to be misled by their fervour; which, while it makes them see all their own good qualities and religious attainments in a light too glaring and flattering to be altogether safe,

throws a shade over the conduct and character of others. Such persons, therefore, especially should endeavour to remember the caution which I am now recommending, as it may be the means, if carefully observed, of saving them from much repentance and humiliation, and possibly from many serious broils and difficulties.

It is but just to remark, however, after the caution which I have just given you, that censoriousness is not, by any means, a characteristic fault of members of the Episcopal church. They are, indeed, rather sufferers from the uncharitableness of others, than justly chargeable with a fault, of which the scriptures seem to have an utter abhorrence. It is often said that they are cold, and formal, and worldly minded, and consequently without any real knowledge of religion. This is a very serious charge, and requires clear, indubitable evidence to justify, or to excuse in the least, those who make it. Whether such evidence is before the world, or not, is a question on which you are quite as competent to decide as myself. The lives and conduct of Episcopalians must furnish it, if it is any where to be found; and they are open to the

view and scrutiny of all who feel themselves in any degree interested in the subject.

But although I do not consider myself at liberty to pass an opinion upon the lives and conduct of the members of the church, and to determine whether they are, or are not, justly liable to the charge of coldness, and formality, and worldlimindedness, yet I may say that I believe the religion of the church is frequently misapprehended, and what is taken for coldness, and formality, and worldlimindedness, is often the fruit of principle deeply rooted in the heart, and an essential part of the Christian character of the person in whose conduct it appears. The religion of the church is quiet, and unostentatious, and retiring, and would much rather meet God in the secret chamber, and hold sweet converse with him there, than be exposed to the gaze of the world, or enjoy all the praise which the multitude could bestow upon it. And this we believe to be true religion, whatever others may think of it. Let me advise you, therefore, my brethren, to cleave to the principles of your church on this point, no less steadily and firmly than on the several others which I have felt it my duty to lay before you on this occasion. Should it be your lot to be



censured as ungodly, and without any knowledge of vital religion, bear it patiently, answering not again. Satisfy yourselves, by diligent self-examination, and earnest prayer to God for the enlightening influence of his Spirit, that your hearts are right with him, and trouble yourselves not about the opinion which others entertain of the feelings and exercises of your minds. If they mistake your character and principles, and condemn you because they do so, they alone are responsible, their error can do you no harm. In fine, to use the concluding words of the apostle in the verse which has, in part, been chosen as our text, Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of peace shall be with you.

I have only now to add my prayers that God may be with you; and especially that he would supply, to your own satisfaction and advantage, the vacancy which will be caused by my departure. I would not leave you in your present circumstances, were I not compelled. My word is given, and I cannot recall it. If it were in my power to recall it, I would rather continue to suffer the inconvenience under which I labour with regard to health, until you might have the prospect of

a successor to me in my pastoral charge, than that you should not enjoy the advantage of those means of grace which you value so highly. But we must part, and part now: and let it be remembered that we may all never meet again in this world. It is most likely we shall not. But may I not cherish the hope that we shall meet in a better, where there will be no more separations, no more sorrow, no more regret? Yes, I do cherish this hope, nor will I ever relinquish it. No distance between us, no length of time shall deprive me of it. It shall be my constant companion in all my moments of joy and cheerfulness, it shall be my support and consolation in all the troubles and afflictions which I may be called to suffer, and it will, I trust, brighten the last scene of my life with prospects and with pleasures, the most agreeable which it is possible for human nature to enjoy. May the blessing of God rest upon you, my dear brethren, one and all. May He prosper you in all your concerns, both worldly and spiritual. May He conduct you safely through your earthly pilgrimage, and at last bring you to glory. To God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost be ascribed equal, and undivided glory, world without end. Amen.

